

IRS News Release

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IRS Warns Consumers of Possible Scams Relating to Hurricane Katrina Relief

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WASHINGTON – The Internal Revenue Service today issued a consumer alert about possible scams taking place in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and other recent natural disasters.

Such fraudulent schemes may be perpetrated through the telephone, Internet, e-mail or in-person solicitations. The IRS cautions hurricane victims and people wishing to make disaster-related charitable donations to avoid unscrupulous scam artists by following these tips:

- The IRS has established a toll-free disaster assistance telephone number, 1-866-562-5227, specifically for hurricane victims. Whenever a matter involves tax relief or tax refunds, the first step a disaster victim should take is to call the IRS.
- For others, donate to recognized charities.
- Be wary of charities with names that sound like familiar or nationally known organizations. Some phony charities use names or Web sites that sound or look like those of respected, legitimate organizations. The IRS Web site at IRS.gov has a search feature that allows people to find legitimate, qualified charities to which donations may be tax-deductible. Legitimate charities may also be found on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Web site at fema.gov.
- Don't give out personal financial information — such as Social Security numbers or credit card and bank account numbers and passwords — to anyone who solicits a contribution from you. Scam artists use this information to steal your identity and financial resources.
- Don't give or send cash. For security and tax record purposes, contribute by check or credit card. Write the official name of the charity on your check.

"We encourage people to be prudent when they are solicited for disaster donations," said IRS Commissioner Mark W. Everson. "Don't be taken in by scam artists more interested in lining their pockets than helping others."

Scam artists can use a variety of tactics. For example, some scammers operating bogus charities may contact members of the public by telephone to solicit money or financial

information. In some cases, they may contact disaster victims and, claiming to be working for or on behalf of the IRS to help the victims file amended tax returns to receive tax refunds, attempt to get personal financial information or Social Security numbers that can be used to steal the victims' identities or financial resources.

The IRS does not ask for personal identifying or financial information in unsolicited telephone calls or mail or via e-mail. Call the IRS toll-free number if you have any doubts as to whether someone is an IRS employee or to verify any information about taxes.

Additionally, bogus Web sites are currently soliciting funds for disaster victims, according to federal law-enforcement agencies. Such fraudulent sites frequently mimic the sites of, or use names similar to, legitimate charities, or claim to be affiliated with legitimate charities, in order to persuade members of the public to send money or provide personal financial information that can be used to steal identities or financial resources.

Members of the public may also have received e-mails that steer the recipient to bogus Web sites that sound as though they are affiliated with legitimate charitable causes.

Taxpayers suspecting disaster-related frauds can:

- Report the fraudulent use of the IRS name to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) at 1-800-366-4484.
- Report fraudulent charity Web sites to ic3.gov on the Web.
- Report other fraudulent contacts either to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at 1-800-CALL-FBI (1-800-225-5324) or to the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Consumer Response Center at 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) (TTY/TDD 202-326-2502).

The IRS has seen numerous attempts over the years to defraud the public and the federal government through a variety of schemes, including abusive tax avoidance transactions, identity theft, claims for slavery reparations, frivolous arguments and more. More information on these schemes may be found on the criminal enforcement page at IRS.gov.